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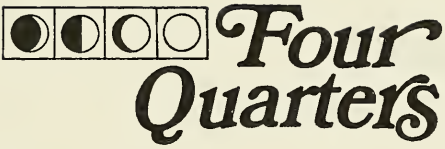

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The Gallery

(M.P.K.)

CLAUDE KOCH

No children leave my gallery
Lured to their endless afternoons
And tug their parents withershins;
No lovers lounge in it to win
A stage toward consummation;
No guardians, old honored men
In regimentals and regrets,
Lock turnstiles on another day.
Nor do the eyes, enlarging mine
Like festive glasses, close; but framed
To circumscription still define
Mock windows and dissembled worlds.
Know that my gallery's of a kind
Private to exclusiveness;
And, as the afternoon retires,
Its pictures deepen in that light
No sun but artifice inspires,
Embellishing with their redress
A subject rare as innocence:

My subject, you — ingenuously
Posed in a lifetime when I lived,
Restored to line and color as
The sun's light fails; a question is:
Displayed within the mind's frail halls,
What artist, artists? Though the face
Of love's self-portraiture, it's clear
That you've escaped that singular
And blind autonomy. Immured
Within my mortal gallery,
For Reynolds lucidly you sit;
You saunter under Ruysdael's sky,
In water meadows (Constable's);
And bend in staid Crivelli's light
To winged and courtly nuncios.
It comes to this: that I have found
In mind's or any other eye
The Presence in my world, the Rose,
The Center that the scene enbounds.

Love

CLAUDE KOCH

I

IN HIS MORDANT MOODS, Warden referred to his memory as "the morgue"— an old newspaperman's legitimate pun. Warden ceased to be newspaperman and became journalist upon his employment by *Pry* magazine. It was a term that covered a multitude of sins—or uncovered them, depending on one's point of view. Warden had almost ceased to have a point of view. He was the first to admit it, though he was not quite so candid in all matters; this, he would say candidly, was because words were a large part of his survival kit, and he used them as need be.

He fancied himself as master of two languages: through one he communicated with the editors and readers of *Pry*; by the other, he communed with himself. Sometimes he suffered a slight panic, like that impelled by a slip upon hidden ice, imagining they both had become one.

But this winter day, with a mean wind across the Hudson belting the South Jersey bus along, he burrowed in a rear seat in the tacky overcoat that an unwise but hopeful interest in lotteries and horses, and an overdue alimony, allowed him; and, in his own voice, sorted certain facts concerning the poet Ruthven Lewes (lately deceased) that made this journey necessary.

The elderly Jewish lady in mink who boarded at Hackensack, declaring at large: "The bus is good. Who would travel alone?", and whose publicly announced goal was to take the warm salt baths at the Marlborough-Blenheim at Atlantic City, interrupted his concentration.

"You have children?" she said. "They're trouble. My son—he asked me if I wanted a blue coffin; and there I was, sick."

Warden had no children. "But you understand," she said, paying not the least attention, so thoroughly did her being bend to her motherly concern; "my only son. The army taught him drink. His wife, now—a good woman. She said: 'I'll get a lawyer.'" Then: "I came to America with the clothes on my back—now my son gets $135,000 when I die. God can do anything."

It was one of those dun November days when anything is given

back as from a flawed marble surface. Warden saw his face sliding along the glass store fronts of chilled little Jersey towns like graffiti that someone else had recorded, implying complaints and aspirations and defeats he no longer recognized.

"My son is fifty-eight," the little woman said into her mink. "What do you do to live?"

Warden explained with a straight face that he was an investigative reporter. "It's a blessing to pour out one's heart to a total stranger," the lady said. It was Atlantic City and Warden helped her with her suitcase. "A fine ride," she said. Perhaps. Warden, who was chary of sentiment, saw it rather as an interruption in the business of survival. But there had really been only two bad moments (the ice again): he had misread the sign at Sea Girt as "Sea Girl," and by a lonely sandy road an arrow seemed to have pointed to "Misty Isles." After the first shock, he realized it as only Mystic Islands. About certain failings he'd joke, because he did have a quirky self-deprecating armor, but the possibility of the word failing him made him uncomfortable.

The bus got underway again. He waved to the mother where she waited for her jitney, wrapped in her mink and thoughts of her son. He had seen her before, in depots and railway stations, pilgrim of love, hopeful of the jitney that would bundle her to some uncomplicated consummation and rest. He recognized the purple prose of *Pry* in that, and returned to Ruthven Lewes and negotiable facts.

Ahead were Sea Isle and Townsend's Inlet and Avalon, the marshes and the inland waterway, and the empty summer homes of his childhood, toward which, at one time, long trains moved over the wetlands in amphibrachs. It had taken a foreigner to bring him back after forty years.

II

THE FACTS WERE that Ruthven Lewes, literary London's chronic expatriate and elusive philanderer, had died at Townsend's Inlet near Sea Isle City, in what he slandered as "the Colonies." Scarcely had he been commemorated by memorial stone in the chancel of Magnus Martyr at London Bridge and his body ceremoniously translated to a bleak churchyard in the mists of Wales than the exploitation of his remains began. There was cause enough, even had he not aspired to the Laureateship; and, as for that, after Auden's refusal only John Betjeman stood in his way. But then, alas, Ruthven was unexpectedly visited by that Sir Death

whom he had celebrated, more than once, in his erotic and enigmatic poems.

It was considered no little thing to have been his intimate, and he would have been blasphemous but unsurprised at the number laying claim to such impropriety. It was a fact that he who had been good copy in the turbulence of his life was proving better copy dead, though this seemed to Warden simply a way of saying that, in this most likely of all probable worlds, fiction seldom defers to the fact.

Mr. Warden pursued fact with the avid unscrupulousness of a master of fiction. It was a habit he'd found necessary, then fascinating. Now, concerning Ruthven Lewes, he asked himself: why—with New York's loveliest and most inaccessible at his feet—had this wild Welshman betaken himself to a fisherman's shack at Townsend's Inlet, where Great Egg Harbor Bay absorbs the tides of the Atlantic, and the channeled whelk marks the incursions of the sea? Warden had ceased to ask himself unqualified questions. *Pry* was paying for such exotic elaboration, and by the word.

It was a question to be put to Sylvia, if she could be found.

"Who is Sylvia, what is she?" The beaches he had ranged as a near-sighted child, anticipating treasure in the wrack of the sea, appeared and disappeared between the gaunt and neglected houses at the ends of deserted streets, and the bus moved not at all with Ruthven Lewes' rhythms but like that "wounded snake that drags its slow length along." It was almost empty now, and as the coast road veered across the marshes the few travelers might have been pilgrims crossing Acheron, so self-absorbed were they. Warden found his line changing: "Who is Warden, what is he?"

III

SYLVIA FERN-LOFTON had served as Lewes' secretary for the the final five unsettling years among, as he took malicious pleasure in saying, "the alien corn." She was an odd and fragile woman, teetering on middle age—small featured, small breasted, with the damask complexion celebrated in certain sonnets—who, like the inconspicuous jingle shells spun up by the Atlantic tides, became prettier the closer one got. Lewes called her "Ruth." When his obsequies were done, she returned unobtrusively to the shanty that rose tentatively on pilings over the Bay, a continent away from that wanderer's resting place; and it was there that Warden expected to find her, on the kind of desperate hunch that barely kept him in pocket money. It was ten o'clock when the bus rocked into Sea Isle—though who could know it from the way the sun sulked under layers

of cloud? As though by common consent the streets were empty, and the boys that Warden half-expected to see, wordless and solitary and happy, in knickers from which all elastic had gone and disreputable sneakers cut open at the toes, had disappeared past houses whose windows opened wide as the eyes of a child, and down those beaches, forty years ago. He go off at the Coast Guard station, into a dwindling morning light that seemed lonelier for his recollections.

IV

HE TRACKED HER DOWN, literally, on the winter beach, following her footsteps toward Townsend's Inlet as the tide wrinkled out. It was a discovery not unlike Robinson Crusoe's at this time of year—but that was another story, incompatible with *Pry.*

"You mean," he was inconsolable (it was a matter of food and drink to him, and the trip had been tedious), "you mean that you worked with that man cheek by jowl for five years and there was nothing between you? Come on. His reputation . . .?"

All in all she had not been difficult to find. In a widow's veil at Magnus Martyr while the High Anglican service unfolded majestically and Ruthven's coffin was incensed, she had not wept, but she had been noticed. Ruthven's wife had snubbed her; his mistresses (those resident in England at the time) were conspicuous—two were already under contract to one of the more sensational London dailies. Then she dropped out of sight. It was a quality, after all, that Warden was aware he had in common with Lewes that led him to the South Jersey shore. He too would have cut his wife off without a penny—though there were few pennies, only the fisherman's shanty, the typewriter, and bills, the reverse of which Ruthven used for his notes. Even the most trendy of poets could hardly claim royalties.

"But to come back here . . .?" Warden dismissed the empty winter beach and the low horizon with one deflating gesture.

Sylvia wore a runner's hooded sweatshirt. She tucked her chin into her shoulder like a sandpiper against the wind, and shoved her hands into the pockets of her jeans. "It was his . . . he gave it to me." Then she raised her eyes to the level of Warden's shoulders, but no higher, and said: "I don't like you, you know. I wish you'd go away."

"That's the story of my life," Warden said, "but even mothers have confided in me." He was a scruffy little man whose unhappiness did not arise from such rebuffs. "It doesn't make any difference whether you like me or not. You've got to live; I've got to live. If

you've got a story, I've got a contract." He was not unkind; she spoke so softly that the wind carried his voice away: "We both have to live."

"What?" Sylvia said. "What?"

"Live," Warden said apologetically. Then, stridently, because she bent close, and he thought it was her hearing: "Live! Live!"

"He said that." She raised her eyes to his, in surprise, as though at the discovery that he existed. Her eyes were the powdery grey of the wintry sea, as sullen and remote; the sea flowed into them, and withdrew toward the same low horizon. He looked through her at the desolate and pewter sky where not a gull stirred; and when she pulled her slight shoulders up against the wind, for the moment he hardly realized she had gone.

Then he thrust his chin into his scarf and followed after. The fringes of the scarf were wet where it unwound and dragged underfoot while he thought of other things. Scarves are made for bigger or at least more self-regarding men. Past Townsend's Inlet, across the channel, beyond the misty dwellings of Avalon-by-the-Sea, perhaps the world was different. In winter, one forlorn South Jersey resort was like another, and an opalescence hugged the skyline of that little distant town.

A wind was at his back, but the dream of hope was his weakness and he knew it—though what hope lay in the diminished and vulnerable figure already out of the sound of his voice down the beach was a question that defied elaboration. Warden resigned himself to optimism in the sense that he kept his feet moving.

The distance increased between them. Sylvia was lighter and the wind was strong. There was a dun, brutal astringency to the beach that chilled him more than the wind: the comfortable, slovenly human litter of summer gone, it was the end of earth now—barebones jetty and piling, no place for flesh. It occurred to Warden then, and not for the first time, that he had no home, that perhaps mankind had no home. And a verse of Ruthven Lewes' roared, bawdy like Ruthven's public voice, with the wind:

Between the mountain's knees there is no peace;
Death cuckolds me and all the land is Death's.
For God's sake give me rest in some reprise—
A Dance not Death's between some human knees.

No one was ever in Lewes' poems but Lewes, and Warden, who had just stepped up to his ankles in a tidal pool, could almost understand. One reached that point where words spoke only of the insular heart—if only to hide it. He gasped while the icy water filled both

his shoes. What the hell had brought him here? The end of his credit? Delinquent alimony? Kidney trouble? Because the place was there? He looked up from his chilled feet to find himself crying.

Down the beach Sylvia had halted too and turned back toward him. She did not beckon, and yet there she waited, and he could not believe it. He held out his hand. Still she did not move. Perhaps she could not even see the gesture; she was remote and singular as a child.

There was no point in going back; there was little to return to. In sheer wilfulness, Warden stamped on through the tidal pool. At one point it rose above his ankles. Driftwood, partially submerged, cut his leg. When he reached Sylvia, his teeth clicked incontinently; he was blue with cold. He was quite willing to believe that it was the end of more than the Island.

A curtain lifted ever so lightly over the drawbridge beyond Avalon on a pendant of opal sky. That, too, was in her eyes—they were a window upon it. "God," he said, "I'm cold." That she had waited was invitation enough. He followed her across the dunes, and they climbed the chancy wooden steps to Ruthven Lewes' last shelter.

V

IF A FISHERMAN had ever lived there he had left no trace. It was more like an abandoned doll's house where some child had played—something hammered together with love and no experience at all by a parent who had no occasion to give his work a second thought. It was, in space, a bit like his own life in time: jerry-built, a temporary shelter.

When his teeth subsided and his eyes ceased to water, Warden could stretch his hands to the potbellied stove and almost touch the far wall of the room. Intimacy was unavoidable, but Sylvia had nothing to say. She sat him down in the one easy chair, brought him an afghan from an even smaller room beyond, settled it around his shoulders, and knelt to untie his shoelaces. He made half-hearted, sniffling grunts of protest, but she ignored them.

"Ruthven Lewes lived *here*?" Then he sneezed, and she shook her head with the tolerant disgust that one scarcely shows to strangers. "You're kind," he said. He leaned over her shoulders and spread his fingers to the stove. "You don't have a drink, for God's sake?" Perhaps she did not hear him.

"It was the only place he lived."

She sat back on her heels with her hands on her knees and seemed to diminish still further before him. "He lived here and died

here." Then, concerning something beyond him, no higher than his shoulder: "He didn't live out there." *Out there* was Warden's country—he didn't have to be told.

"And you?" It was sheer politeness; his thoughts were on the clear possibility of pneumonia.

"Yes, I lived." Sylvia pressed her hands to her knees; even when she stood she was not much taller than his head. "I lived for five years." Warden had the impression that she identified him as an offending party, as a straggler, wandered in from the years before—or the years to come. There was that mild contempt in her posture, in the distaste with which she draped his socks over the one remaining chair dragged before the stove. He was not surprised except that she bothered at all. His wife had successfully convinced him, in the final days, that his appeal to womankind was radically limited. The tough skin that *Pry* had grafted served him then.

But Sylvia turned back from poking at the cannel coal in the firebed of the stove. Her eyes that had been the sea and the sky's grey were amethyst. What days, he wondered, were reflected now? A contemptible part of him said, apologetically: "I can't get warm. I need a drink, for God's sake."

"You won't like what I have. It's *Rock and Rye.* It's for what ails you."

"Oh my God," Warden said, "you'll be offering me a mustard footbath next." Yet it was comforting; it took him back.

The cabinet was under a misted window, tilting in its frame. Sylvia poured into a coffee cup: "I don't care what they write about him. Out there's where he ran when he was afraid; that's where he hid—and in his poems." She sipped the drink, then handed the cup to him. She sat on the floor between Warden and the stove. He could see the line of her shoulder blades as she bent over her hands, head bowed to the palms as though they had a message for her. If his drink were scotch and he had his usual portion, those could be wings folded under her bodice. Certainly the advantage of drinking religiously was that it made for a better world.

Her voice was so low that he thought at first she was humming—or keening: "When he was here he sat on the steps in the sun. He listened to the gulls and watched the sea. He knew the plants that grow wild back beyond the dunes, yarrow and sea lavender; he knew the terns and all kinds of sandpipers." The recitation was guileless, almost academic. "And he told me about the clouds, cumulus, cirrus . . . I never knew so many." She lifted her hands to her cheeks: "He said he could see the gods beyond the horizon, like Poussin. . . ."

Her mouth was small, the lips pursed like a maiden's in a Book

of Hours. It was piety he feared, more than pity, so he said: "But you *slept* in there." She lifted her head, not comprehending, and he could not sustain the cruelty: "*You*, I mean."

Whatever he had meant made no difference. "I never knew the names of things until I met him; he taught me the names of things. I wasn't anything at all." She spread her hands. He pulled his arms against his sides and shivered: "It's the cold," he said. "I can't get warm."

She rose to pour him another drink. Something outside the window held her there. "The first time I saw him I was sitting on that jetty," she said. "It was March; it was raining. He brought out a poncho. I didn't know who he was. He was very quiet and happy." Sylvia put the glass in his hand, and sat as though to disguise a shyness: "He said I looked . . . I looked like a peri. I didn't know what he meant. That's what I remember best about him. . . ."

Warden tried again: "The state of others was hardly a Lewes theme, was it?" He quoted gently:

"Let Adam die by inches or by yard,
Prodigious the performance or inept,
Yet praise the randy insolence that swept
Under Time's rug the nonsense by the way
Up to the grand rest of the Seventh Day,
And bed for Heloise and Abelard. . . ."

"Oh," she propped her chin on her elbow, "that's only his poetry. He never read me that." She looked at Warden with her silly, untutored innocence: "He needed me."

Warden was annoyed: "People can make fools of themselves, thinking of others."

"I don't know. . . ."

"But you *were* his 'secretary'?"

"I lived with him, and he helped me to see." Her knuckles were white, and just for a moment the fire that burned in the open grate was in her eyes; then it was out, and the stubborn, unwilling tears startled him. "He gave me his secrets, he said. That's why he called me his secretary. He said nothing else would matter."

Warden fumbled with the afghan to find his handkerchief. He knelt before her and drew her head in against the rough weave. He felt hopeless and incompetent, and the little, odd comforting sounds he made were strange even to his ears.

VI

IT WAS ONLY for a moment. She did not indulge herself, but Warden was put in mind of the inconsolable griefs of childhood that seem to exist only to evoke tenderness in others, else why would

they linger, without origin and without redemption?

"Don't," he said, "for Christ's sake. . . ."

She pulled back to the limit of his arms, and they knelt, undone and helpless in the possession of such knowledge as they had of each other. Even as he struggled to speak again, and at last said in little better than a whisper "Can I stay?", and berated himself for a fool, Warden saw himself drowning in the unbearable compassion of her eyes. For hadn't he served *Pry* all these years under the impression that it was truth that could scarcely be endured? No matter—she would hardly forgive him for comforting her, and of course she did not. She shook her head.

There was nothing for it but to leave.

Sylvia was regretful and withdrawn. But she struggled with a suitcase shoved under a cot in a corner, and it did Warden no good to protest. She hauled it forth, elegant leather and expensively monogrammed *RL* in regal gold capitals. The bizarre turtleneck sweater she pressed upon him had last been worn by Ruthven Lewes in that heated reading at the New York YMHA that had stood the world of poetry on its ears. It hung from his shoulders like a shroud, but it was warm. So, shortly, in his own overcoat and shoes, but in Lewes' scarf, sweater, and socks he stood at the bus stop by the ramp of the bridge to Avalon, feeling peculiarly transformed, at least on the face of things. The last bus inland reared over the center span and butted down the ramp. It was the way—past pilgrims of Hackensack to the Hudson shore. Sylvia was still on the steps of the shanty where he had left her, her face hooded against the cutting wind. She seemed like a caryatid in that uncertain light; and he thought that she had watched Ruthven Lewes so, when he prepared his flight inland on such days as this. Wet sand blew in his eyes, the Almost-Laureate of England waited for a South Jersey bus, a horn hooted—and one gesture of her hand would have released him. Could it be that Lewes, tutoring her in the names of things, had neglected the common "Farewell"? Warden watched the tail light of the bus recede up the empty road.

There was a thing to do: he could cross the drawbridge to Avalon, and deliver her from where she stood to retire into a little warmth with whatever mysteries she had of Lewes, and perhaps a secret of his own. It was ten cents to use the pedestrian lane—not an expensive charity.

At the center of the span he saw that Avalon was an illusion—the skies had not cleared at all. And back on the Inlet side, no longer erect but huddled against the steps of the shanty like a shape cast up by the sea, Sylvia. He knew he could go back—if he dared.

But he could not stand, irresolute, on the bridge. A Coast Guard cutter, its horn wailing, rounded the point of the Inlet toward the

open sea. Warden was still a professional. In spite of other matters, the first florid sentence of an article shaped itself to his mind:

> *When Ruthven Lewes fled from his mistresses and his poems to the Jersey shore, what rescue awaited him? What treasure did the wild Welshman seek in the shadow of Avalon?*

Pry would like that.

But then, while a chill bit at his writing fingers, it came to him that he could not answer his own question—except by appealing to something stranger than fiction that would bring no delight to *Pry* at all. The machinery of the bridge rumbled even as he stood on it, and the guard gesticulated from his shack. Warden looked back, almost timidly. Fallen angel, sea wreck—whatever she was—it was his heart that was foundering, and this time he could not help himself. Within him a voice long subdued struggled to raise what seemed to be a question of some import. Alas, it was shouted down by the guard who stormed from his shack and, like a beached and land-locked Charon, shooed him across the bridge toward Avalon.

My Father at Bull Run

ERNEST KROLL

"A family war," he said. "The foulest kind.
Just think. If that were all to do
Again, I might fire this through you—
Assuming we were of divided mind."

And, hitting home so close, the bitter sense
Of it, detached from his intent,
Estranged us. The metal that he meant
Lay grim, as fired between our difference.

Lancelot, Tonsured, Walks the Field at Dover

JOHN WHEATCROFT

No matter what the angle between you
and the skull, the holes that held gone eyes
fix what you look with: right pit a plea,
the left an accusation. These open graves,
are they the work of hands or wind on sand?
Not all were barged by queens to Avalon.

The jaws are chapless, bare-toothed—
it could be fear or fury. And fingers
make an empty begging cup.
Within the loins these bones show naked.
Could God pull Eve from any rib like these?

And you, you've put away those arms you plied,
those arms that plied you too,
when this now chalky fellowship was flesh and blood,
and you were the morning star.

Afterword: A parable for the century of Hiroshima and Dresden, the poem takes off from Sir Thomas Malory's account in *Morte D'Arthur* of the destruction of the Round Table after a battle of mutual annihilation between the forces of Arthur and those of his half brother Mordred at Dover. Lancelot, whose love affair with Arthur's queen, Guenever, was a cause of the civil war, was not present for the battle. Having taken Holy Vows as an act of penance, Lancelot now returns to meditate upon the corpse-strewn field.

C. Day Lewis and Communism

WALTER POZNAR

MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN about the widespread influence of Marxist ideas among British intellectuals and writers in the thirties. As Aldous Huxley put it, "by the end of the 'twenties a reaction had begun to set in—away from the easy-going philosophy of general meaninglessness towards the hard, ferocious theologies of nationalistic and revolutionary idolatry."[1] Though an intellectual like John Strachey could produce, in *The Coming Struggle for Power* (1932), a reasoned and forceful brief for Marxist principles, writers like Auden and C. Day Lewis and Spender seemed to have been drawn to the mystique of Communism with little, if any, sober understanding of its dialectic or its program of revolutionary action. Though a recent book calls some of these writers *The Angry Young Men of the Thirties* (1975), the feelings of C. Day Lewis were muted, his attitude toward the world he lived in ambiguous. His involvement with Communism reveals not only his deep commitment to abstract principles, but also a temperament incompatible with any ideology.

What Day Lewis tells us of his Communist period in his autobiography *The Buried Day* (1960) says little of why he became a Communist, of what forces drove him to embrace the God That Failed. The psychology of conversion Arthur Koestler documents in detail is missing. Day Lewis was never, as he admits, "a stormy petrel or an arguer of the toss," but simply a man who "wished only to live quietly, write poetry and believe what he believed . . ." (p. 204). He notes that "we were singularly fortunate, compared with the young of today, in believing that something could be done about the social and political evils confronting us" (p. 208), yet nowhere is he clear as to what *he* wished to do. The small Communist group at Cheltenham "was a fairly amateurish organisation, giving a newcomer the impression more of a combined study-group and nonconformist chapel than of a revolutionary body" (p. 211). Day Lewis's emotional bias toward Communism was precisely that. There was, in fact, no reason for him to define revolutionary action for, as he discovered, his neighbours did not in the least ostracize him or regard his beliefs as in any way dangerous. He was, to the village, "a harmless

[1] *Ends and Means* (London, 1937), p. 274.

eccentric . . ." (p. 212). Nowhere does he give evidence of having felt very strongly any urge toward decisive action. The natural diffidence of his character responded to no call to arms, no compulsion to convert others, no need to become a leader in the coming struggle for power.

The middle-class, privileged background from which Day Lewis and his friends came supplied no basis for active social reform or revolutionary doctrines. This privileged status effectively insulated them from the realities of working-class life. They were incredibly naive about the effects of unemployment on millions of British workers, the ruthlessness of international politics, the everyday life of the ordinary Englishman. As Day Lewis tells us, "the windy abstractions, the face-saving, the obsessive and childish manoeuvring for position, the mere, sheer bloodymindedness, which are the public aspect of contemporary international politics, make me sick" (p. 86). It was this awareness of his own ignorance that drove Orwell to work in the hop fields, to sleep with tramps, and live among miners. But Day Lewis could only, as he says, "make some attempt to imagine the conditions we did not share, the unemployment and malnutrition which had been rotting the heart out of a million working-class families . . ." (p. 210). The deplorable conditions in many Western countries Strachey, Laski and others had come to detest, inevitably led them to a closer study of those conditions and their causes, to specific programs of reform or revolutionary action, to a broader view of historical forces and how they could be informed with the Socialist ideals of justice and equality and freedom.

DAY LEWIS MAKES IT CLEAR that his Socialist-Communist picture of the world was largely theoretical. He "had never met a high-ranking industrialist or financier, a Cabinet Minister or a Trades Union leader . . ." (p. 210). The "System" he opposed was, of course, barricaded behind the "Church, the Press, the Law," but beyond these stereotyped targets he wandered like a babe in the woods. With no objective knowledge of the influences that had shaped the twentieth century and no perception of the ways in which ideas can initiate major changes, he tilted at Capitalist windmills as a sop to his conscience. He refers to his "susceptibility to the heroic . . ." (p. 210), his romantic love of the Russian worker astride his Homeric tractor. This "romantic humanism" (p. 211), as he terms it, was not uncommon among friends of Soviet Russia in the thirties. The mythology of Soviet propaganda was felt in England and America by intellectuals and artists who saw no viable alterna-

tive to a decadent capitalist system other than Russian collectivism. The vogue of Russian films reinforced this heroic image which endured throughout the thirties, despite the purge trials, the emigré literature, and the defections of Gide and others. There is, in what Day Lewis says, an almost wistful nostalgia for the heroic, a disenchantment with the intellect he had hoped to glorify in some of his early poems, a flight from consciousness. "But what attracted me most, perhaps, in the Communist philosophy was the concept that we discover reality by acting upon it, not thinking about it: to one whose grasp on reality seemed so insecure, and who at times craved for action as for a drug, this concept felt like salvation" (p. 212). Day Lewis was never an intellect. The complex issues of his generation were beyond his reach. These he could never command, hence the attractiveness of Communist mystique, the abandonment of self to the Cause, a vital impulse toward action, the solacing effects upon one's conscience, the surge of historical forces moving inexorably toward the rising sun. That disastrous feeling of aloneness, so endemic among twentieth-century writers and artists, would yield to a new communion of souls. "The new world some of us envisaged was one where the ties should be of flesh and blood, not of money and paper, and where the social system should have re-integrated the individual personality" (p. 217). There would be a new Religion of Humanity, in spirit like that envisioned by George Eliot and the Liberals of the nineteenth century.

What, then, becomes of the poet? What Day Lewis wrote in the thirties about the role of the poet in a time of revolutionary change reinforces what we find in his autobiography. The three essays contained in his *Revolution in Writing* (1935) are entitled "The Revolution in Literature," "Writers and Morals," and "Revolutionaries and Poetry." The writer, in an age difficult to live in, must be concerned with politics to prevent himself from going mad. He knows that "the old structure of society is incapable of dealing satisfactorily with the new developments of life . . ." (p. 10). He is faced with two worldwide movements, Communism and Fascism, one of which he must support. The writer who feels he cannot embrace politics "has only one other choice—psychology" (p. 12), but whatever his choice he must have a "settled background" (p. 14) for his work, and this background can only come about through revolutionary changes in society, opposed, of course, by those in power. A revolutionary writer will need to absorb thoroughly the new revolutionary principles. The worker poet should not despair, for "if his work is true poetry, it will do more than a hundred Boards of Education and culture-fanatics to re-establish art as a vital force, and, if he is a real revolutionary, it will be a revolutionary force too" (p. 44).

But throughout these essays Day Lewis never forgets that a

poet must, first and foremost, be a poet. His dedication to revolutionary principles does not mean the poet should inundate his work "with hammers and sickles (though these will appear correctly enough in their place); nor with slogans and catchwords . . ." (p. 37). The poet needs a larger audience he can infuse with revolutionary ideas, and there is some evidence that such an audience is growing. The "average serious young writer" does not hate his country: "His attitude towards his country is not unlike that of the Puritan exile—a compound of physical love for its beauty, nostalgia for the tombs of his ancestors, and rancour against the rulers who make it uninhabitable for his conscience" (p. 31).

HOWEVER MUCH all of this sounds like a new revolutionary commitment on the part of the writer, Day Lewis was confronted with the very real possibility that what he loved most—poetry—was not, after all, important to those deeply involved in the revolution. There is an interesting comment in his *A Hope for Poetry* (1934) that throws light on this question: "But it is difficult not to suspect that renewal of interest in poetry proceeds largely from an interest in the social connections to be found in much 'left-wing' work; that it is the communist or fascist tendencies, the up-to-dateness of the imagery, the preoccupation with specifically modern problems which attracts, and not the poetry itself" (p. 28). Though he agrees that this is better than nothing, he doubts that a genuine revival of interest in poetry as such has occurred outside literary circles. His own love of poetry, his need to live by and for its dictates, evoked that instinctive distrust of writers and artists felt by most revolutionary leaders. In a review of *Noah and the Waters* by Day Lewis, Edgell Rickword wrote of the *Left Review:* "It is this insistence, I think, on maintaining the contemplative rôle of the poet, so threatened to-day, and regarding the revolution as something which will restore the possibility of this contemplative rôle, that confines the poem to being one more statement of the inability of the capitalist system any longer to use its poets productively, but prevents it from being a revolutionary poem . . . . Of course, Day Lewis knows as well as anybody that the poet cannot stand outside the dialectical process, but his poetry is still infected with the feeling that struggle is transistory, and that 'afterwards' we shall get down to work."[2]

The same type of criticism appears in Douglas Garman's review in the same journal of *Revolution in Writing.* Garman recognizes the pamphlet as a beginning, but devoid of any real understanding of Marxism. The conclusions Day Lewis reaches are unreliable "largely because the theoretical groundwork on which they are based is not yet clearly worked out."[3]

[2]*Left Review*, II, No. 7 (April 1936), 340.

[3]*Ibid.*, II, No. 4 (January 1936), 182.

In *The Buried Day*, Day Lewis observes that "in a tricky, darkening decade we were a generation which had not vision equal to desire" (p. 217). But how strong *was* this desire in Lewis? Not, apparently, strong enough to drive him into revolutionary activities. Not strong enough to compel him to see at firsthand the human consequences of a system he theoretically rejected. Not strong enough to make him renounce the comforts and perquisites of his class. Not strong enough to take him into the factories or the mines. Day Lewis believes that "it is not altogether correct, however, to think of us as a lot of starry-eyed suckers joyously leaping down into the political arena" (p. 218). It was not that he was a "sucker," but that his dilemma was symptomatic of his impotence. His commitment was not much of a commitment. Therein, perhaps, lies the tragedy of the artist in our time. What was fierce dedication, as in Rolland, appeared in Day Lewis as a small flame temperamentally shielded from the bitter winds of historical change. Unlike Aldous Huxley, who tried in *Ends and Means* (1937) to formulate a philosophy of meditation and inwardness, Day Lewis was not essentially a seeker in any philosophic sense. In the "Postscript" to *The Buried Day* he writes: "I find it almost as hard as ever I did to decide between contrary opinions, or to form any coherent idea of my own identity from the mass of contradictions my nature presents me with . . ." (p. 242). This constitutional distrust of self makes positive action virtually impossible. In his inaugural lecture at Oxford (1951) he said that "the poet's prime motive is a felt compulsion, a duty to discover himself through his memories—the conscious memories and the buried ones, the personal, and some say the racial memories too, the archetypes."[4] The Charles Eliot Norton lectures published as *The Lyric Impulse* (1965) return to this search for identity: "Every good work of every artist is there to remind man of his roots, to refresh them, to satisfy—if only for a few years or hours—his perpetual need for wholeness" (p. 153).

THE PLIGHT of the confused idealist in the thirties was not, of course, peculiar to Day Lewis. Virginia Woolf found herself similarly perplexed, though her distress was more acute than Day Lewis's. As Quentin Bell notes, "her attempts to deal with political reality were bewildering, and at times exasperating, both to her and to those who had to collaborate with her."[5] Her sympathies lay with the oppressed, the unfortunate, but though she lent her name, and at times her presence, to anti-Fascist movements, she was appalled by bitter exchanges between Leftist advocates: "I was pressed by E. M. Forster to be on a committee—they bothered me to take part—endless correspondence: I refused to budge, finally resigned.

[4] *The Poet's Task* (Oxford, 1951), p. 7.

[5] *Virginia Woolf: A Biography* (New York, 1972), p. 421.

But it was harrowing. A woman called Ellis Williams ran amok. Gide and other famous French abused me."[6] Though Bloomsbury was traditionally apolitical, Virginia Woolf and others were sufficiently terrified by the menace of violence and irrationalism to make some type of protest. It is precisely this feeling of horror one misses in Day Lewis.

In this context some comments by Edwin Muir in *An Autobiography* (1954) are illuminating. Speaking of some intellectuals and artists in the mid-twenties who pursued "the cult of untrammelled freedom" (p. 228), he observes that "they were lost and on the road to greater loss, and ready to accept any creed which would pull their lives together and give them the enormous relief of finding, even under compulsion, a direction for their existence, whether it had a spiritual meaning or not" (p. 229). He contrasts his own faith in Socialism and the grounds on which it was based with the emerging interest in Communism. Muir's generous instincts "could still pity the stock-broker distorted by money as well as the casual worker deformed by poverty. What claimed our love and compassion was misshapen humanity in all its forms, and we looked forward to the great release. Instead, Communism presented itself as a strange, solidly made object, very like a huge clock, with metal bowels, no feelings, and no explanation for itself but its own impenetrable mechanism; it was neither glad nor sad, and reverenced only its own guaranteed working" (p. 234). Communism could find no justification for "forgiveness."

What appears in Day Lewis and his fleeting involvement with Communism is neither belief nor Muir's notion of compassion, neither rage at his own privileged status nor a Shelleyan vision of the future, neither faith in the value of his work as a poet nor a conviction that he could, at the very least, die on the barricades like Turgenev's Rudin. He was, in the words of Neal Wood in his book *Communism and British Intellectuals* (1959), a "mild mannered desperado." He was incapable of the dogged faith in the Soviet experiment held by the Webbs. One did not have to believe in Marxism and/or the Soviet Union to sense that the literature of fine sensibilities was obsolete. The social and aesthetic feuds of the twenties seemed childish. Who, in the thirties, really cared about the running battles waged by the Sitwells against academicism in the arts? There were British writers who continued to turn out amusing novels of manners, but it was Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* that was relevant and moving, not James Hilton's sentimental reveries. Certainly no one as sensitive as Day Lewis could have remained totally unaffected.

[6]Quoted in Bell, p. 424.

What Day Lewis later wrote in his lectures and articles on poetry demonstrates a return to the civilizing and humanistic role of poetry. The writer in England has not, in the twentieth century, enjoyed the esteem and reverence sometimes accorded his French counterpart. It was this modest recognition that made it possible for Day Lewis to survive as a man and as a poet. The English, who have never taken ideologies seriously, saw in Day Lewis not an ideological lunatic bent on ravaging the system, but an interesting poet who could, after his defection from Communism, pursue his own modest interests, for his idealism was of the heart, not the mind. His innate decency survived because he did not really need a new society in order to continue writing poetry. His "romantic humanism" was more firmly rooted in his character than revolutionary principles. Philip Henderson was undoubtedly right when he wrote, in *The Poet and Society* (1939), that "Lewis is only at ease, indeed, he is only a poet—when he forgets the Marxist mountain, that has completely deranged his poetical compass, and allows his natural, and after all quite Georgian, lyrical talent free play" (p. 220). Day Lewis did not, in the end, leave England with Auden and Isherwood, or abandon his traditions as Robert Graves did. His temperament reminds one, in some respects, of Harold Nicolson's. When Nicolson records, in his diary in the early thirties, the remarks of close friends who rebuked him for ideological lapses, he in no way suggests that he has become a moral outcast. There are no anquished soul-searchings, no thought of permanent alienation from the cultural and intellectual life of English society. So Day Lewis could never have renounced the deep ties that linked him to his past. His turning away from Communism did not mean acceptance of the isolation Silone describes as typical of what many ex-Communists in Europe could not escape.

In English society the lack of real interest in literary and scholarly pursuits allows a Day Lewis to find his place. The type of cultural warfare waged between C. P. Snow and F. R. Leavis on the Two Cultures issue is strictly intramural, a querulous fluttering of the intellect. The prose of Day Lewis is a model of restraint by comparison. The English could hardly scourge a poet who, in his inaugural lecture at Oxford, could say: "This surely is not least of the poet's tasks, and one that today may be the most needed—to incline our hearts towards what is lovable and admirable in humankind" (p. 24).

Fatima's Wedding Dance

MICHAEL JENNINGS

Today, of all days, has been called mine. And tonight,
which for four years I lay in fear of, also mine.
I bend, I snap, I bite back tears, that what was bought
with years of tears, sweat, labor of my father's hands,
shall not break, shall not snap. Of me they shall speak well.

And if you find my body frail, a small bird-like thing
not fit for love or spoil, the arms thin, the back weak,
you have not seen my father's hands, the bent fingers
reach like dark claws into the parched and broken soil,
nor do you know the yearning of this heart of hearts—

that soon, I too will dance the dance the women dance,
wail as they wail, give lands, daughters into the hands
of those that come—and that my sons, grown tall, shall take
what's theirs—and that I come to dance the funeral dance
of this down-cheeked boy whose dead weight and hands I bear.

So let it not be said I came as lamb to slaughter,
or that for me the young she-goat was brought to slaughter.
My name is Fatima. I bring my father's lands,
and mine is the blood flows back to my father's land.
For me they fly the red kerchief, my mother's daughter!

The Jump-Rope Poem

JANET McCANN

jumping rope
now to "keep trim"
she remembers rhymes
of other days
down alleys of childhood
mother mother I am sick
call for the doctor
quick quick quick

bright arcs in air
ritual of being
the jumping above the invisible
net that was always there
to catch her
who unseeing

went jumping down the years
magically chanting
cinderella dressed in yellow
went upstairs
to kiss a fellow

& leapt once
lightly
beyond reach of rope
until all further jumping
was a straining upward
without rhythm
grace or hope

counting *thirty-one*
thirty-two
thirty-three
& thinking how many things
had grown a heaviness
a weighing down toward death

she who once high leaping
carried her body
light as her breath.

Explanation

JANET McCANN

out there at night:
tiny pairs of eyes
in the azaleas,
behind the privet.

cats' eyes, they say,
really give light
and do not just reflect
headlights, streetlamps.
they contain a
luminous substance, few
natural things
will shine like that,

but here there are
no cats.

these lucent points,
then, in darkness, these
are ghostcats. cats
no one wanted, thrown
into the river in sacks,
gassed, shot
by stupid cowboys
from rotting porches.

they have names,
shadowwind, willothewisp,
stalkreed, featherbreath.
stand in your lighted
doorway and call them
softly. one by one
they shut their eyes
and disappear.

Articles of Faith

MARY ALICE AYERS

I SHALL NOT, dear mother-in-law, commit adultery with any man but thy son.

A silent promise. Oh the impermanence, the impotence of that, especially where I am concerned. For me to keep it, a promise must be spoken. The verbalizing is important.

The spoken word is all important to my mother-in-law. For her, a word spoken is an emotion felt; what is said is what is meant. And Katherine—I had been asked to use that word rather than the more usual "Mother"—Katherine loved conversations, word exchanges made freely and openly. She measured distance by the sentence rather than by the foot or yard. Now she said: "You're so quiet, Louise." Then: "Are you so far away?"

Physically, I was quite close. We were walking side by side down a dusty country road that winds through an obscure valley in Suffolk County, Long Island. Northport, the town is called. No one walks in Suffolk County, so what little there was of our conversation was broken up by the scared horn blasts of startled drivers who passed us as fast as they saw us. Each time, their surprise carried me along a short distance until I saw suddenly an essential relation between the word spoken and the promise made aloud. Finally, I saw a connection that had been bothering me by its absence.

The marriage vow, the promise, Katherine's son, Tom, and I had made five years ago had been spoken aloud, but spoken before a civic official, not before a priest. Young obstinacy had forced me to retain a Protestantism I had very recently espoused, and so our marriage did not fall within the realm of Canon Law. Rome could not bless our union. Holy Mother Church, therefore, saw two of her children living in sin. Tom's mother, too, saw the sin more clearly than she saw the marriage.

Was I far away now? Yes, but it was Tom's mother who had defined the distance between us. How could I close the gap, by making promises I couldn't keep?

My husband's mother is of average height. She is very heavy, however. *Very* heavy. Her weight is gathered as if spun by centrifugal force all to her stomach, and she wears this mass proudly. Perhaps she is pleased with the shape of her body because it shows that, if not long and happy, at least her life has been long and full.

Her weight was her only burden; I was carrying an old, solid wicker basket and inside that, a pair of thick, blunt-edged household scissors. With these we would cut the wild flowers we were going to discover on our walk. There were no wild flowers growing alongside this road as far as I could tell, and I said as much to Katherine. We should try another, one with less traffic.

"Oh, I like the way this road twists and turns," she said. "And it's full of surprises—there's a lover's lane up ahead."

That sounded like a good opener and I waited patiently for the follow-up. Would she talk first about her son's actual mistress or my potential lover? But she fooled me; she often did that. She is not stupid, my mother-in-law.

"Isn't the air wonderful, Louise? It must be a treat for you, coming out of the city."

She was wrong there. All the fresh country air was wasted on me. Katherine smelled of her house, so the day smelled of her, musty. I couldn't breathe in any of the day, golden though it was.

"Oh! What's this?" Katherine bent over the roadside growth, grunting from the strain. It was a weed. She clutched at it, still bent over, holding the blossoming stalk an inch from her eyes. Although she has twenty-twenty vision, Katherine always examines objects like that, holding them right up against her face. Which is perhaps why she overeats—once there, the food is too easily put into the mouth and swallowed. "Wonderful!" she said. "Downy False Foxglove; how pretty."

So what was a weed to me was a wild flower to her. What then could we see in common as one and the same thing? Ever, could we, would we, agree?

DOWNY FALSE FOXGLOVE was cut with the ordinary household scissors and placed in the wicker basket. It was typical of her not to have pruning or garden shears for this activity; she just "hadn't gotten around" to buying them. She was generally slow to action; I was surprised she had finally gotten around to looking into her son's marriage, which, I supposed, was the real reason for my visit. Ostensibly, I had been called out to help her over her current bout with hypertension or nervousness or whatever it was she experienced off and on. Her husband's death, she said, had left her with a vague feeling of dislocation.

I felt rebellious, rather than helpful. Katherine wriggled her nose, and sniffed the air, scenting trouble. "Tom was allergic to everything as a child," she said. "We never had flowers in the house. In summer, with the windows open, he sneezed constantly."

Shades of the past. How like her to be pulling ghosts out of the

basket with the scissors! She snipped at another weed, pronouncing it "Slender Gerardia" while Tom walked between us. Tom, slender, young and red-nosed, carrying a wet handkerchief. Tom, sensitive, so blonde and so fair, the restless soul of a poet and the curious mind of an adventurer. Tom, so easily carried off by an illusion or a challenge. . . .

But I was dreaming. I reminded myself that Tom had stopped sneezing when he got married. "Tom simply might have objected to your choice of flower." I almost said "weed."

"You are not practical, Louise. Sometimes the greatest beauty is the simplest to obtain; you need only reach out for it, and hold on." We passed under a maple and she pulled off a leaf, shredding it calmly. "Although it's not your fault. What can he see in her!"

Katherine and I were normally separated by forty years and sixty miles, but we had never been so close. I agreed with her there, yet I knew Tom better than she. Here was my chance to explain that it was the adventure of the whole thing to Tom. He had been much taken with Durrell's *Justine*, with the romance of it all—his new love was Jewish. She was also single, attractive, and right next door. I wanted to mention the book to Katherine, but, although bright, she was not an intellectual. Last year, she had admired one of our lithographs and asked who Paul Klee was. I doubted she knew de Sade's *Justine*, never mind Durrell's.

Well, I had learned something from her statement: "What can he see in her!" So Katherine had been let in on Tom's next conversion to the extent of being shown the articles of faith. Was the religious difference her only objection?

"No. What can he see in her? She's so dreadfully dark."

I laughed, remembering the problem I had been for her. Once when she'd teased me about my coloring, I'd asked if I was too dark to be accepted by fair Aryans of such perfect textbook quality. "You're dark enough," she had said, "but it's in your blood. You can't help it."

I am part French, and therefore, Q.E.D., seductive and deceiving, as well as dark. The guilt I felt for taking a boy away from his mother was compounded by my sense of being a thief. Like a dark gypsy brigand, I had stolen into the family camp and seduced her keen son away from the light of her fire, that burned but gave no warmth.

To my husband's mother, warmth was one with darkness. When she had caught me kissing her son in her hallway when I should have been washing dishes in her kitchen, she said to Tom: "You would have to marry a hot-blooded woman."

For her, the dark was warm, the light was cool. Coolness was good, warmth was bad. The dark, then, was warm and bad. If Tom

married a very dark Jewess, what beckoned? No doubt nothing less than the hot fires of hell. The religious confusion that reigned in his first marriage would rule over his second. Where would it all end?

Katherine went on. "I don't think Tom told you that his father and I were separated for two years. When we came together again, it was better than it had ever been before. The air had been cleared."

I had been told, but thought I shouldn't admit that I had. "Was that," I asked, "during the time when you were poor?"

"No. It was later. But we were never really poor. Who said that? We always had enough to eat, always. You mustn't think that we were ever hungry."

Tom was a depression baby who at one point had eaten off a poor pine table made to look richer by the piling up of starch and more starch—foods low in cost and high in calories—potatoes, bread, beans. The most painful remembrance for Tom's father was that for one brief period he seemed to have failed his son.

WE PASSED someone's lawn, appearing strangely out of place on this primitive road, and on it a white dogwood, blossoming in petals of four, each flower penitent as the arms of the Cross. Their beauty mellowed me; I would go along with Katherine in pretending that part of her past had not been lived.

I said: "People here seem rich enough." There was a hedge of hemlocks on my left. I peered in—a hedge usually concealed a house. Through breaks in the greenery, I could see small pieces of white. Spliced together, the pieces would form a stone house.

"I know the owner," Katherine said. "Let's visit. She won't mind our stopping by."

We stopped, and took tea with a lady who seemed tired and looked much older than the forty she was. We took tea; she took what she referred to as "Early Martinis." It was around lunchtime. The lady was called Grace, which was unfortunate, since she certainly lacked at least that social asset. Another was volubility. Every remark we made led to a dead end; she would answer "Yes" or "No" to it, and nothing more.

Grace drank her "Earlies" in a wine glass, raising it to her lips dozens of times without taking a sip, as if afraid to, and then, finally, swallowing the whole "Early" in one throw. After three of these she loosened up and offered us lunch. A maid served it on a mahogany table, possibly authentic Sheraton, so highly varnished and waxed I could see my face in it. Our hostess's nervousness was catching and I crossed my legs restlessly. The center clip that held the table together fell out and the two leaves slid apart. I could see that Grace had taken off her shoes. Her bare toes were twitching.

"I don't know what's wrong with that one clip," she said, jumping up out of her chair. "My husband used to hammer it in so it would stay for a while. I hammer and hammer at it, but it keeps falling out. Everything's coming apart here, everything."

When we left, Grace relaxed enough to offer me some companionship. She was alone; I was alone. "I'll come and visit you in the city," she said. That was all I needed.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN, Katherine spotted some blue Quaker Ladies, dainty, fragile, slender, standing primly in what looked like dried grass. "You snip this time," she said.

"What's Grace's problem?" I asked. "Besides alcoholism."

"I think she's found out, as no doubt you will, that there are many men to make love with, not many to marry."

I felt like pricking her with the little common thistles growing close by. Instead I handed her the scissors, blades first. Speechless with anger, I warned myself that hate was easy to find, but only when one was looking for it. And I needed to love this woman. If she had done nothing else, she had made her son, ultimately, if not intentionally, for me. For me. Mine once, if not forever.

We rounded a bend in the road, and I gasped at the scene revealed. We were on top of a rise and what looked like all of Suffolk County lay beneath us, waiting dormant and fecund in the June sun, neat acre after acre squared off by rows of lettuce, beans, tomatoes. All of it waiting, about to be raped and laid waste to by greedy speculators. "They"—the genderless, faceless "they" who made all the decisions—promised a bridge that would tie Long Island to Connecticut. So someday a link would be formed and a spell would be broken. I imagined dozens of landless box houses replacing the squares of houseless land—my husband's mother's land divided and sub-divided, and my husband perhaps a millionaire overnight.

Katherine distracted me by waving the scissors in the air, blades pointed towards heaven. "Louise!" she cried. "Think of all you will be giving up!"

The direction of the scissors made me wonder to which she was referring—her property, her son, or my place in the next world. I would surrender that for all time if I divorced and re-married. But wait! Katherine was being inconsistent—if she's never recognized our marriage, how could she recognize, or be disturbed by, our divorce? Or was it merely that she found the second daughter-in-law much less suitable than the first? She didn't want an infidel inheriting her precious land.

I wanted to do the right thing, by her, by the world, but what was it? Who would tell me? I blurted out: "What am I to do during this hiatus?"

"Hang on," she answered. "Wait."

How inspiring. Poor Katherine. She lacked my mother's ability to come up with a platitude in a moment of severe stress. Such as here: "Two wrongs do not make a right."

"And what if it isn't a hiatus?" I asked. "What if a temporary attraction turns into a permanent need?"

"It won't. I know my son."

"At some point I have to think about myself," I said.

"That was all you were doing, it seems to me. You were behaving out of character, Louise. You were cool and detached, perhaps bored with your marriage. I noticed it. You were too involved with your work to notice it, or your husband's reaction to it. Now if you had a child, Louise, instead of a career. . . ."

It wasn't too late to have a child, but by whom, how?

Dear Tom:

Your mother suggested I invite you over for a candlelit dinner. We'll have champagne. . . .

Katherine was talking about the comfort her son had been to her as a child. But I had heard otherwise on other days. Her son had been, and still was, a hellion.

"Oh, look! Star Grass." She called my attention to some gold in the green of a meadow. "Beautiful, but you can't pick it. It wilts the second it's cut."

How stupid. A flower that couldn't be picked. And the same perverse God who had created it, had created Katherine, and me, and Tom and his Justine, and the current situation, therefore. Small wonder I had lost what little faith I had.

As we walked up the winding drive to Katherine's house, a black shadow detached itself from the entrance and started toward us.

"You mustn't think he came to see you," Katherine said.

I wasn't thinking that, but wondering why men of God clothed themselves in black. I was thinking, watching the priest come closer, looking less like a black crow and more like a man, of death, carrion, corpses, darkness unfathomable and incomprehensible. I was thinking how the weeds, or flowers, in the wicker basket looked half-dead, needing water and shade. I was thinking about my day spent in the country and what the purpose of it might have been.

The walk, the visit, the wild flowers, the view. Had Katherine simply been trying to show me what loneliness was? But I knew what loneliness was. What was love?

To a Scottish Girl, Living in Saudi Arabia

(For Anne)

LARRY RUBIN

The desert winds are now your home
And you blossom in the sand,
A miracle of Allah. Oiled
Fingers point to unstained skin,
Your northern glances, cool
At sunset after Jeddah's glare.
Five times a day the mosques are yours—
The wounds of Christ, John Knox's curse
Come creeping through the tribesmen's robes.
Glasgow girl! The lochs have lingered
In your eyes, and now the citizens
Must tread their dunes through alien mists
And find—all compasses gone wild—
Their way is strewn with heather, heather, heather.

Lessons of the Beach: Art and Seduction

LARRY RUBIN

An infinite rose
An infinite dawn
Emblaze the ocean
Where gods have spawned

Seaweed, pearls
A scuptured maid
A fish's tail
Some hand has played

With breasts and shells
A coral life
Redeemed by hair
Her navel, there

No sun shall melt
Her molded curves
Her only foe
The licking waves

A mermaid dies
Upon this shore
An idle tide
Finds it a bore

The lifeguard knows
She's just a husk—
An infinite rose
An infinite dusk

On the Pier

EUGENIA PLUNKETT

The people fished. A little boy,
Taken with a sudden joy
Of April wave-on-wave,
Said to his friend, "Look at my whale!"
And dropped into his friend's pink pail
With careful, grave
Balancing, a sea fish. I
Looked at the enormous sky
And the great wave
And wondered: was what God gave us,
Spring, more meritorious
A gift, or less, than this small sea-god gave?

Merit? That's for one to judge
Who's given gifts—sans count, sans grudge—
Through many years of wave-
On-wave. Yet though I've nothing to
My name that I have given you,
I'll merit what I give.
For this is how I'll give my gift:
Lie like the water lies, and lift
The whale-weight in the sun, and live
One moment all of April through,
Move like waves that move to you—
Till you and spring and fish will all
Be, in the sea-blue interval,
Balanced, each a gift a god would give.

Will You Love Me In December?

SEAN McMARTIN

MY PHONE RINGS one evening. It is one of those frail, pastel moments, on the seam between light and dark, when a call normally demands nothing and occasionally promises some mild magic. I am one who is deep into magic. The babble of a long distance operator practically assures that it is my sister, Marcia, on the other end. No magic this time. It must have to do with my father.

Since my mother's death he has lived with Marcia and her husband in a fine split level in the Mount Lebanon section of Pittsburgh. He has his own room and bath, the brick steps are swept clean every day and there has never been dust on the upper edges of picture frames. Marcia and Ben have no children to play hard rock into old ears, to trip over or for whom to paint word fantasies of a fading age.

"That you, Jack?" Marcia snaps in an overtone to the bored whine of the operator.

Who else would it be, given a deep, masculine voice in a man's apartment? She can make even an order to the butcher for eye of the round sound like a Papal Interdict against the sellers of dead flesh. The operator escapes.

"Of course it's me."

"Dad passed away early this morning. Heart attack. He's being buried on Wednesday."

She sounds like an accountant who has reached the bottom line without mishap. She draws a breath and waits for a reaction. There is none. My father is—was—eighty-one. She plows on, abhoring the vacuum her pronouncement has created.

"He was eight-one, after all. It's a blessing, really."

I tell her abruptly that I will fly out. It satisfies her. I find myself thinking, like Uncle Remus among the ante-bellums, *Time flies.* No, that's nonsense. It seeks its tail like a dog and goes around in pointless, endless, unmeasurable circles. I am trapped once again in old snares and delusions, recalling random things with somebody else's nostalgia.

At fourteen, my father told me (he repeated the story every year come spring training), he was bat boy for John McGraw's New

York Giants. In those days baseball was less a big business, more a tra-la-la thing. "It's great to be young and a Giant," as the great third baseman, Larry Doyle, reputedly said. Every once in a while McGraw would let my father pitch batting practice. The first time he told me the story, my mother questioned it immediately. She always questioned anything he said that lent him glamour because he was Irish (she was not) and thus given to excess. He would say, right hand raised, eyes filled with bewilderment, "I may drop." Which didn't necessarily make it so. This time his older brother, Tom, said, Yes, Sam had been bat boy for the Giants. Yes, every once in a while they had let him pitch batting practice.

"I'm pitching to Roger Bresnahan," Pop told me once when I was young, when stories of the early heroes still thrilled me, when my father's bona fides had grudgingly been filed into the family archives. He went through an elaborate windup, bulldog face twisted with guile, wide shoulders straining forward to catch the sign tall and awesome as a cathedral . . .

("Oh, for God Sakes," my mother said when I once lamented the fact that he seemed to have shrunk a bit. *"Shrunk.* He's five foot seven, same as he's always been and he never weighed more than a hundred thirty-five soaking wet in his whole life.")

". . . when I send a fast ball too close to his chin. An accident, doncha know. Oh, he might of been a great catcher, all right, but he was a mean gink. From then on he tries to belt every pitch back at me. I'm scared stiff. Then Christy Mathewson, ol' 'Big Six' himself, walks over and says, 'Cut it out, Bresnahan.' Just like that. And Bresnahan cuts it out." My father smiled at the splendid memory. "Oh, he was a Jim Dandy, that Matty. College graduate, 'n' all." He made a motion of a ball dropping down and away. "He had some fadeaway."

I call to let my wife know about his death. She lives in Doylestown, a northern suburb of Philadelphia, while I have an apartment in Philadelphia's Center City. We have been separated for nearly a year. My fault. I am not easy to live with. Like my father I was thirty-five when I married. Phyllis was twenty-four. Perhaps that explains it. My ten-year-old son, Jeff, lives with his mother. I see him on weekends, on alternate summer vacations and one night each week. We are, I suppose, close. He knows his grandfather through old snapshops and one barely remembered visit. Phyllis's voice is sad, less from genuine feeling, I am sure, than from a sense of the fitness of things. Since my father and I had not been close for many years, one can not expect her to be devastated. We decide that neither she nor Jeff will accompany me. Jeff shouldn't miss any school and anyway, Phyllis feels, the closeness to death is not good for him. Is it for anybody?

Marcia meets me at the airport in Coraopolis. She has not changed. Not an unattractive woman, she has a mouth that is a bit too grim, hazel eyes too intense, with our mother's way of piercing to the heart of things. She recites a litany of my father's shabbier defalcations just before he died, as though dying were not expiation enough.

"He took to stealing candy from the candy dish and stuffing it into his pocket like a greedy little kid, then *denying* it. *And*, can you tie this, Jack, he told me last week he thought his hair was getting thin on top."

I should not laugh but I do. (What will Marcia think of me?) His hair was reduced to fuzz, like a coconut, by the time he was eighteen. He told us once that he had lost it from malaria contacted while he was in the Philippines fighting the Moros.

My mother, her face arranged in the mien of martyrdom, said, "Sam, you've never been out of the Bronx in your life."

He raised his right hand and said softly, hopefully, eyes twinkling, "I may drop."

Uncle Tom would not verify that one.

"Sam Laverty," my mother shouted. "The Lord hates a liar."

He spread his arms and sang a song written by his beloved Mayor Jimmy Walker. "Will you love me in December as you do in May? Will you love me in that good, old-fashioned way?"

My mother would not relinquish her fury for so small a price. When I laughed I got slapped. The funny part of it is that she didn't even know he was bald until they started going steady and by then it was too late. Whenever he dropped in at the Brissach home to pick her up, wherever they went afterwards, he kept his straw katy, always worn at a salty angle, firmly on his head. My grandparents never commented on his breach of etiquette. In those days people really practised *laissez faire* and there was room for minor eccentricities. I went right on believing that he had lost his hair to malaria while fighting the Moros. No matter what anybody else said.

THE REMAINDER of the trip through the outskirts of Pittsburgh is made in silence. Marcia takes me right to the funeral home, a white, clapboard mansion with black carriage lamps along the front doors and a sign that might but does not quite read, "Ye Olde Grayson Funeral Home." The body is laid out in Viewing Room B. There is a small group of elderly people seated on folding chairs. My brother-in-law, Ben, gets up to shake my hand and murmur something that must be condolences. He is plump and inoffensive looking, a rather decent man who might just be bland enough for my sister. There is nothing to be done but to approach the casket, kneel

down on the prie-dieu, say an Our Father and a Hail Mary and force my eyes to the effigy in the casket.

He's five foot seven . . . never weighed more than one thirty-five soaking wet in his whole life.

He is not even that much now, a small bundle of a man with a scrunched-up face on which the mortician has effected a look of utter bewilderment, as though he had known my father and had striven hard for verisimilitude. I think my father will get up, raise his right hand and say, "I may drop." No. He *has* dropped. Life has taken him at his word. There is a rosary. Just before the final decade I jump up and go outside into the foyer for a smoke. My sister joins me, her eyes accusing, perhaps hoping for me to choke on the cigarette. I am being unfair; it is her everyday look.

"The doctor says there was a recurrence of the old thing," she says. "It happens sometimes right before the end."

The old thing, a euphemism for Armageddon. I feel the faint pulsations of an old wound.

My father had worked for the National Laundry in the days when laundry was delivered to customers sopping wet in horse-drawn wagons. He wore his brother's old World War I uniform with the wrap-around puttees and the "Fighting 69th" insignia on the choke collar. On his head perched a wide-brimmed tweed cap stuffed with a coil of tissue paper so that he rustled whenever he moved his head. His customers affectionately referred to him as "Father Duffy," which must have tickled the soft-core sinner in him. At the height of the Depression he was putting in fifty to sixty hours a week, up and down flights of tenement steps, rain or shine, summer and winter, in pain or out of it. In time he was promoted to route foreman. He drove the first of the small panel trucks the laundry bought and made the rounds of the East Bronx overseeing the work of the delivery men. Suddenly, for no apparent reason, he broke wide open like a bundle that has been crammed too full. He would burst out crying at the supper table, paper napkin pressed to his mouth, into the pillow at night, on the street with nothing between him and the dark cave but the heels of his hands against his eyes. He would scurry from the room when the doorbell rang and hide in the big bedroom. It frightened me. I could not handle it. My mother took me by the shoulders, shook me roughly and said, "One baby in this family is enough. Now you stop it, Jackie, do you hear?"

She convened a family meeting one night. The French door between the small bedroom and the living room was open slightly. I could see my father sitting all alone on the plum-colored sofa. Facing him in a tight half circle were my mother, who did most of the talking, Uncle Tom, who said nothing, and Father Cassidy, the pastor of St. Joseph's Church, who invoked the Lord at proper in-

tervals. In the bed across the room from me Marcia scolded her doll.

I could hear my mother's voice. "Sam, if you don't stop it, as God is my witness, I'll walk out of this house and never set foot in it again."

My father, bulldog face shining with purpose, stood up, raised his right hand and said, "I may drop."

I thought, *You Goddamned liar.*

My mother took him from one doctor to another. The diagnoses and prognoses were vague and uncertain because psychiatry was still in the horse and wagon days like the laundries. He lost his job. The unions were beginning to come into their own about that time and the laundry was resisting attempts to organize the place. There were hints from some of the men with whom my father worked that there had been some trouble. No one wanted to or could be definite. A close friend of his finally told my mother that he had heard that my father had driven one of the laundry's goon squad, a man named Sal Delmonico, to a place near Throgg's Neck where Delmonico had cornered one of the organizers and beaten him so badly with a blackjack that the man had nearly died. The friend did not want to be quoted and if she gave him away, he said to my mother, he would lie like a trooper. My father denied the whole thing, raising his hand and saying, "I may drop." over and over again. The officials of the laundry raised their hands and told my mother, may they drop, that the story was preposterous. In fact, they said, they thought the unions were a blessing.

The newspapers had carried nothing about any such incident. The police had not been approached because they were an alien force to the people of our neighborhood. Hadn't they, after all, been used before to bust strikes?

My mother had no choice but to sign my father into Rockland State Mental Hospital in upstate New York. On the day Uncle Tom drove them up, wanting to run, to hide, to sprout wings, not knowing what else to say, I mentioned Christy Mathewson.

"Matty," my father said softly, squinting back into legend. "Oh, he was a Jim Dandy."

He was at Rockland for four years, hating it with his eyes but never once complaining. I was old enough now to visit so every fourth Sunday, though I protested, my mother dragged me along.

"How would it look," she said, "his own son?"

On one of the early visits, in December, he gave me a handsome little box of interwoven copper and brass strips that he had made in the machine shop. A series of dots, forming the letters "J.L.," had been hammered into the cover. (I still have it.)

"It's a little rough," he said, shoulders twitching with embarrassment. "But, anyway, Merry Christmas, Jackie."

I knew I must not cry, not for gratitude, not for shame, not in

this place, not in front of this man, who, after all, had jousted with Bresnahan, had been sainted by Mathewson.

I blurted out, "Hey, remember Christy Mathewson?"

"Ol' Matty," he said, smiling away the years. "Boy, do I? Big Six. He's dead now, ain't he?"

He came out of Rockland, eyes a little more distant perhaps, but able to smile and sing in that quavering tenor, "Will you love me in December as you do in May?" The laundry would not take him back in any capacity. They were sorry. Jobs were scarce, the state of the art had advanced beyond his narrow ken, please appreciate their position. He finally landed a job running an elevator in a small building on Broad Street in lower Manhattan. There he flew what must surely have been a Spad or a Sopwith Camel, forty-eight hours a week into the wild blue yonder, made small bets on the horses (I do not recall that he ever won anything) and generally held his own with life. When they automated the elevators he was let out. They gave him a handshake and wished him well. With help from my brother-in-law and me to augment his Social Security ends were met. There had been no dreams, therefore, no bitterness. When my mother died there was no question that he would go with my sister. I saw little of him. I remembered him on his birthdays, at Christmas and occasionally I would call and say a few words to him. After all....

THE FUNERAL is brief, colorless, a dry run for something yet to come. I can not cry. Marcia does, softly, dutifully. Ben works his jaw muscles. They both drive me to the airport. There is a long, quivering silence in which Marcia grants me amnesty, time to separate myself from the distant voices, the poignant song, the cruelly accurate, line-by-line inventory of my youth.

"Don't be a stranger," she finally says.

"No, don't," Ben says.

"I won't," I say, knowing that probably I will.

Propinquity, shared memories, cooperative pain, they are obstacles.

I arrive home late in the afternoon. The hell with jet lag. It is the night I usually see Jeff. He is ready for me. Phyllis is out shopping. He wears the catcher's mitt I gave him. He is tall, slim and grave, dark haired and dark eyed, like Phyllis. We say nothing of his grandfather who is less than a memory to him. He tosses me a baseball and squats down, looking very Johnny Benchish.

"Fog one in, man," he yells. "I can hold your smoke."

My face is twisted with guile as I lean forward to catch the sign, my shoulders wide, as tall and awesome as a cathedral. I rear back and throw. The ball breaks a few inches. *Backwards.* As God is my witness, I have not intended that.

"That's a screwjie," Jeff yells in admiration. "Tug McGraw's strikeout pitch."

I feel pain fill every inch of me.

"Don't call it that," I say in a wobbly voice. "It was, is now, ever shall be, world without end, a fadeaway. Matty's strikeout pitch."

My son stands up, grinning, eyes shining, seeing something that is not there. To the last days of my life, to the last of his, I must remain that way.

I know that I will not.

Mausoleum

MICHAEL WATERS

The dead recite their masses
in the cold, blue stone of dusk.

The sculptures are the same:
dull infants swell like angels
above each chiseled name.

I'll be quiet as a mouse.
Though both my parents live here,
this is still my father's house.

A Twist In Time

HENRY PETROSKI

The calendar makes a Möbius band,
Saturday twists into Sunday, like this,
The weeks repeat, repeat, and time and time
Again we make the figure eight in time.

This warped infinity of time in space,
This road from here to here, without a fork,
This argument with but a single side,
This sanity between a single edge,

Becomes complexer and perplexes more
The more we try to disentangle it
Without destroying it. These scissors take
Longer and longer and longer to cut

These lengthening, twistening, multiplying
Perpetual pages with which we are playing.

Contributors

CLAUDE KOCH, poet, novelist, and professor of English at La Salle, had his first play *(Unhurrying Chase)* performed last May at the University of Toledo Theater. He has just finished *Alba*, a verse play set in 1200 in Compostella. The work of ERNEST KROLL has been widely anthologized and recorded; his poem in this issue will be included in his fifth volume, *Figures Cut in the Clay*. JOHN WHEATCROFT, who teaches at Bucknell University, had a novel *(Edie Tells)* published last year. His latest volume of poetry, *A Voice from the Hump*, contains a poem that first appeared in *Four Quarters*. An article by WALTER POZNAR, "The Survival of the Humanities," was in last March's issue of *Liberal Education*; he is professor of English at Keuka College. MICHAEL JENNINGS grew up in southwestern Iran. His publications include work in *Prism International*, *The Pennsylvania Review*, and *Syracuse Guide*. JANET McCANN lives in Texas; she has placed her work "in an unlikely bunch of places including *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Literary Review*, *Hollins Critic*, *Christian Century*, and *McCall's*." "A born New Yorker, an Atlantan by adoption," MARY ALICE AYERS has published stories in *Epoch*, *Connecticut Critic*, and *Mississippi Review*. LARRY RUBIN last appeared in *Four Quarters* in 1966; since then, he has published two volumes of poetry *(Lanced In Light* and *All My Mirrors Lie)* and received the Annual Award of the Poetry Society of America in 1973. He teaches English at Georgia Tech. Work by EUGENIA PLUNKETT, a resident of Fort Smith, Arkansas, has appeared in *American Scholar*, *Yale Review*, *Hudson Review*, and the New York *Times*. A story by SEAN McMARTIN, "The Shadow of a Lie," was in last autumn's issue; his work has been listed in *Best American Short Stories* in 1969, 1972, and 1976. We nominated a poem by MICHAEL WATERS in our last issue ("Remembering the Oak") for the Pushcart Prize volume. HENRY PETROSKI, a recipient of a 1976 Illinois Arts Council Literary Award, is represented in the recently published *Ardis Anthology of New American Poetry*. Finally, faithful readers of *Four Quarters* will miss "Marginalia" and may be interested in a non-contributor's note: editor JOHN J. KEENAN is on leave, working on a book, *Writing for Non-Writers*.
